

ARTICLES OF FAITH

by

His Eminence, Ephraim
Metropolitan of Boston

Part II

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BLOW THE DUST OFF

Beware of the doctrines of heretics, for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you.

(Saint Isaac of Syria, *Homily 4*)

It was with great expectations and high hopes that we looked forward to entering the theological division of our seminary. After all those years in the college division, we were chomping at the bit to get into some serious theological studies.

One of the classes we were really looking forward to was the study of the New Testament, with a professor who had the reputation of being a very spiritual man. With eager anticipation and the naïve innocence of youth, we came to the class, fully expecting to delve into the deep things of our faith.

It was the Gospel of Saint John — the loftiest of all — that we were to study. Oh joy!!

As the sessions began, and the lessons fell into a pattern, one thing became very obvious to us. Our professor, an archimandrite, who had attended the theological school of the University of Athens, and had gone on to further studies in Germany, was a deep, a very deep, admirer of the very liberal Protestant scholar, Rudolf Bultmann.

It was Bultmann this, and Bultmann that, and the typical Western rationalism everywhere, and Bultmann's theory of "demythologizing" everything in the Holy Scriptures. That is to say, if something in the Holy Scriptures was described as being a miracle, it was "obvious" that it had been interpolated into the text by later authors; if it was a prophesy, it was "obvious" that it had been interpolated into the text *after* the (supposedly) prophesied event. Needless to say, no evidence was ever given for any of these speculations. It was always "self-evident" (to whom?).

In addition, our professor would often sprinkle his lectures with comments beginning with the phrase, "You Orthodox say *this*...." or, "You Orthodox believe *this*" We assumed that he was just being funny, or ironic. But one could never be certain, because the Orthodox answers he gave were feeble, and so we were left with the vague impression that our Orthodox beliefs had no real support anywhere.

Well, a number of us were getting pretty tired of this. We thought that this was, supposedly, an Orthodox Christian seminary.

So, one day, one of our braver classmates raised his hand in class.

"Father, may I ask a question?"

"Of course," responded the professor.

"Well, you are Greek. All of us here in the class are Greek. As you know, in this country, the Greeks have a reputation for knowing how to make money."

"What are you getting at?" asked the professor, with some irritation. I should add here that our professor had the reputation for being quite imperturbable and calm in dealing with various situations.

"Well," answered my classmate, "we are paying you *money* here (with the word "money" he pounded his fist on his desk) to teach us Orthodox theology."

At this point, the rest of the class — cowards that we were — ducked our heads behind our books, afraid to look up.

"If we wanted to hear what the Roman Catholics are saying," continued my fearless classmate, "we would go down the street and get it from the horse's mouth at Saint John's Seminary in Brighton. If we wanted to hear what the Protestants are teaching, we would go right to the primary source and attend classes at Boston University or Harvard. But we are paying you *money* here (at this point, he pounded his fist on his desk again) to teach us Orthodox theology."

We finally plucked up courage to take a glimpse at the professor. He was *very* angry from this frontal and very audacious (but thoroughly justified) attack. In those days, you always spoke to a professor with respect and deference. Finally, after a few moments, the professor regained his composure and, looking at my classmate with a steely gaze, he said, "If you want, you can go down to the library, and find what John Chrysostom [notice: not "*Saint*" John Chrysostom] has to say about what we are studying, and you may *blow* the dust off the books of his commentaries [here, he made as though he were blowing the dust off a book], and read them yourself. *I don't care what he says*," he ended with emphasis. After this, the class continued as before, as if nothing had happened.

Now, this professor, as I mentioned, was an archimandrite who stood before us at the Royal Gates in the holy services in church, and there would intone the ending prayers: "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers...."

But, in the classroom, it was "*I don't care*" what the Holy Fathers say.

The really sad news about this is that, in a few months, this man became a bishop of the new calendar jurisdiction he belonged to.

There *is* some good news here, too. Seminarians who came after us tell us that this bishop mellowed in subsequent years. In those days, especially after Father John Romanides and Father John Meyendorff, it became fashionable to quote the Church Fathers, so he too would cite them in his classes, and was more circumspect in what he said. Maybe he had understood that he had overstepped himself, and had scandalized us. True, our classmate had been very provocative and brazen, but it was only out of frustration and desperation that he had acted in such an outspoken and audacious manner.

But the really frustrating thing is that we were encountering this same rationalistic, "Latin Captivity" approach in almost all our "theological" classes.

Our only recourse was to "blow the dust off" the books of the Holy Fathers and to start reading.

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THE SHACKLES OF THE LATIN CAPTIVITY

Or

Your Sin Is Not So Original

Part One

The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying: What mean ye that ye use this proverb saying: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not use this proverb in Israel. Behold....the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

(Ezekiel 18:1-4)

Are we aware that the term "Original Sin" appears nowhere in the writings of the Holy Fathers? This is purely an Augustinian, and thereafter, exclusively Papal and Protestant concept. The Patristic term is *propatorikón amártima*, "the forefather's (i.e. Adam's) sin," "the ancestral sin." The implications of this term are very different radically different from those of the term "Original Sin." For as we know, the doctrine of "Original Sin" is precisely that we all inherit the *guilt* of Adam's sin. Before Augustine, this teaching was unknown to the Church of Christ. In contrast, the Fathers taught that we inherit the seed of sin, a proclivity for sin because of the corruption into which we are born. This weakness (like a tendency for diabetes that we might inherit from our parents) rules like "another law" in our members and "wars against the law" of our minds, bringing us "into captivity to the law of sin" which is in our members, as the blessed Paul writes to the Romans. Nowhere in the Scriptures or in the Fathers does it say that we inherit the guilt of Adam's transgression. I am responsible for and guilty of my own sins, not Adam's. Indeed, the Fathers say that we "inherit sin," by which however, they mean a weakness for sin, or, we are born into a sinful environment which encourages us to sin. And, lest anyone should be led astray and misinterpret this expression "inherit sin," the Fathers are careful to bring us back to "the thought of true religion" by pointing out the other aspect of our nature, which also is inherited. For, as Saint Basil notes,

Virtues exist in us also by nature, and the soul has affinity with them not by education, but by nature herself. We do not need lessons to hate illness, but by ourselves we repel what afflicts us; the soul has no need of an instructor to teach us to avoid vice.

(*Hexaemeron*, Homily IX: 4)

In the *Life of SS. Barlaam and Ioasaph*, written by Saint John of Damascus, we read:

"For the habit of virtue, taking its quality from the soul, seeing that it has some natural kinship to it and claims God for a help-mate, becomes hard to alter and exceeding strong; as you see, courage and prudence, temperance and righteousness are hard to alter, being deeply seated habits, qualities and activities of the soul. *For if the evil affections, not being natural to us, but attacking us from outside, are hard to alter when they become habits, how much harder shall it be to shift virtue — which has been by nature planted in us by our Maker, and has Him as a help-mate, if so be, through our brief endeavor — be rooted by habit in the soul?*" (XIX: 173)

In his explanation of John 9:2, Saint Cyril of Alexandria dedicates a whole homily to the condemnation of the doctrine that one generation is responsible for or guilty of the sins of a former generation. He says that people who teach this "silly nonsense" do not fear "to mingle [pagan] Greek error with the doctrines of the Church." He writes:

By the mouth of Moses He published laws innumerable, and in many cases those living in bad habits were ordered to be punished, but nowhere is a command from Him to be found, that children should share the penalties incurred by their sinning fathers. . . . *nay, not even does He lay upon a descendant the faults of his ancestors like a burden.*

(Homilies on St. John's Gospel, Book VI, chap. 1)

And again, he writes:

For it would have been in a manner absurd, that the sentence of condemnation should fall upon all men through one man, who was the first, I mean Adam; and that those who had not sinned at that time, that is, at which the founder of our race transgressed the commandment given unto him, should wear the dishonorable image of the earthy.

(Homilies on St. John's Gospel, Book II, chap. 17)

As Saint Cyril points out, if God actually did "lay upon a descendant the faults of his ancestors," He could surely not be considered merciful or long-suffering or forgiving, but spiteful, vengeful and unjust.

Like the Prophet Ezekiel, the holy Prophet Jeremias is also very clear about this:

In those days they shall say no more: The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his *own* iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, *his* teeth shall be set on edge

(Jer. 38:29, Septuagint)

A Non-existent Problem

One wonders — since, as the Latin theologians say, one can inherit Adam's *guilt* — why, then, can he not also inherit the justification and

forgiveness that Adam, our progenitor, received when Our Saviour descended into Hades? However, in view of the understanding that the

Church Fathers had on this whole question of "Original Sin," a contemporary Orthodox theologian has rightly observed that the Latin doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is "a wrong solution to a nonexistent problem." Why is this so?

In order to rescue the Mother of God from inheriting the *guilt* of the "Original Sin," the Latin theologians had to invent yet *another* new doctrine — the doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception". That is, the Mother of God, say they, was conceived and born "immaculately" *without the guilt* of Adam's sin (which, as we said, is itself a false doctrine).

That is why the Immaculate Conception is "a wrong solution to a non-existent problem."

Stay tuned. It gets better.*

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THE SHACKLES OF THE LATIN CAPTIVITY

Or

Anselm's Unsatisfactory Theory
Part Two

The Scholastic "God"

When people speak about the "Redeeming Sacrifice of Our Lord on the Cross," we have to ask them: "Are you thinking in Anselmian terms?" Because, if they are, they have Saint Gregory the Theologian to correct them in his homily, *On the Holy Pascha*.

Indeed, if Anselm [+1109] or any of the Scholastics had ever bothered to read Saint Gregory, as well as other Fathers, on this point, they would never have propagated their "Satisfaction" theory, nor the concept of "Atonement." A Heavenly Father Who, in His wrath, can be satisfied only by the spilling of His Son's Blood, is a pretty grim sight indeed, not to say unspeakably impious. Taking this and their doctrine of "Original Sin" into consideration, it is no wonder that, in the West, the growing rationalism of the Renaissance produced not only an apathetic renunciation of God, but a passionate and hate-filled revulsion and repugnance for anything that had to do with religion. For truly, the Latin doctrine of Atonement is the

product of spiritually ailing and pathologically depressed minds, and it could produce only hatred for, and not love of, God.

How could it be otherwise? For behold what a morbid spectacle, what an impious mish-mash of Greek philosophic error, pagan religions, and distortion of the Scriptures reveals itself in the Scholastics' doctrine of Satisfaction and Atonement. Since "Original Sin" is precisely the inheritance of the *guilt* of Adam's transgression, this false presupposition triggers a whole chain reaction of theology, which must cope with this problem. (One wonders: if one accepts the principle that the guilt of one man's sins can be passed on to the next generation, then why cannot the guilt of *all* men be passed on to the following generation? And if this is so then in principle, every generation passes on, not only its own guilt, but also the guilt of all the preceding generations — thus the guilt increases by geometric progression. Although the Latins and Protestants do not officially teach this, as far as I know, it is not so clearly ascertained whether they actually deny it either.)

In the meantime (according to this theory), God was looking down at the proliferating race of man, which, naturally, was spreading the guilt of Adam's sin far and wide over the face of the earth. But do not think for a moment that this "God" is the One Whom we profess, Who is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Fathers. This "God" is a very different one indeed; for you see, he is the God of the Scholastics, who have given up Saint Paul's "foolishness" and have turned to Aristotle's "wisdom" for definitions (which Saint Gregory the Theologian, as you may recall, refers to as "frivolities and quackeries").

The Greek Super-Goddess

Now, for the poets and philosophers of the pagan Greeks, everything — the cosmos, things visible and invisible, and the gods — depended on and rotated on "the spindle of Necessity", as Plato says in the tenth book of *The Republic*. So too Aristotle, who had been a disciple of Plato, accepted this principle of Necessity. All things for him, including "primary beings" (of which the "God" of the Scholastics is one, even though, for them He was the *only* one, since they had to give some kind of Christian veneer to all this) were what they were and they could not be otherwise. What the primary beings are by nature, they are by necessity. Even primary beings are governed by the necessity of being what they are. Thus, Necessity underlies the nature of being.

*Of course, I speak in irony. In fact, it get much, much worse.

Well, the Scholastic "God" is, by this definition, just, and he cannot be unjust, because he is what he is and he cannot be otherwise (for you see, the Super-Goddess Necessity is hanging over his head like a domineering and nagging wife, and he must do her bidding). Divine Love? It does not enter into the picture yet. It cannot. Divine Justice *first* has to be satisfied before Divine Love can begin to work. The Scholastic "God," who is just (by *necessity*, remember — "I am what I am and I cannot be otherwise," says he plaintively) cannot be unjust, and mankind's accumulating guilt is becoming intolerable. "God's" just wrath is growing greater and greater, and mankind is sagging lower and lower under the guilt, and there is only one Person who can calm this wrath.

Making God In Man's Image

Now, by the reckoning of Anselm, the inventor of the "Satisfaction" theory, since God is infinite in majesty, the insult to Him is also infinite in magnitude. (How finite beings can perpetrate infinite acts is not explained).^{*} Hence, the satisfaction of this outrage to the infinite God likewise has to be of infinite worth. Therefore, God *has* to be the victim by Necessity [remember her?]. No man, says Anselm, could have infinite merit to make such a retribution, to pay such a price. According to this reckoning, only God Who became man can serve as the victim. Only the Son can satisfy God's need for justice. Only He can atone for the accumulating guilt of man. Only the blood of the Lamb will wash away mankind's guilt and make God the Father happy again. The more the Son suffers on the Cross, the happier and more "satisfied" the Father's Justice becomes (and thus we have the blood and the gore pouring and oozing from all the Medieval Spanish and German and Italian crucifixes. The more blood and gore, the better. For more on Papal "religious" art, see below).

One becomes rather sick to his stomach even considering these blasphemies. One yearns to get out of this sick and stifling prison of mental and spiritual insanity and hallucination, and into the fresh air of our God's love and meekness and compassion. One longs to flee from the stifling air of the Scholastics' schoolrooms, with their philosophic definitions and "primary beings" groaning under the yoke of Super-Goddess Necessity.

^{*} Anselm's theory was based on the Medieval Feudal Code, i.e. "an honor is measured by who bestows it; an insult is measured by who receives it." Essentially, Anselm is here telling us that God was following western Europe's medieval code of chivalry, i.e. Anselm was creating God in Western European man's image.

Is there any way out? Is there anyone who can deliver us from this mental and spiritual sickness? How can we break the shackles of this captivity?

Normally, I don't have a mean streak, but this one time I thought it might be a good idea to leave you hanging in suspense.

But fear not! Help is on the way!

Provocations to Iconoclasm (A Footnote)

Some of the most intense criticism of Roman Catholic "religious" art comes from the Roman Catholics themselves. I will cite one example below. It is from an article entitled "Provocations to Iconoclasm" by John Lyon, who was an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame when he wrote this article in the 1980's. Here is a sample of what he writes:

One of the characteristics which certainly proves the soundness [*sic*], vitality and indestructibility of the Roman Catholic church is that she has survived her own iconography. To have grown up Catholic anytime during these last two or three hundred years has meant to have had a good chance that one's religious life would be inundated with graphic and plastic art which, at its best, could be described as sappy, in the middle of its range as pandering to pruriency, and, at its worst, as out rightly solicitous of responses in which sexual libido and sadomasochism are promiscuously mixed.

If there is any truth in Blake's suggestion that we become what we behold, then such abominable [Roman Catholic] graphic art and statuary ought to be destroyed. Art ought to be an aid to worship; instead, it is often an argument against sanctity and belief.

What is revolting about so much representative church art since the seventeenth century is that it is romantic; that is, it is stagy, posed....

John Lyon also complains that their religious art fluctuates between the sadistic and the silly:

The crucified Christ in the center above [the "high altar" of one parish] is flanked by a mourning Mary and a moderately

inconsolable John, both in stagy poses dominated by hands clasped in supposed grief, and glances upward at the crucified.... The typical representational positioning of Christ's body upon the cross illustrates the worst and most dangerous characteristic of what perhaps ought to be called "romantic church art." To borrow a line from the end of a Brendan Behan play, what romantic crucifixes and pietas, for instance, seem to be saying is: "O death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling?"

The question concerning which artistic conventions might be most appropriate in ecclesiastical art was eventually hammered out in the Orthodox church after a century of horrible internecine war and persecution, and left the Byzantine world and its derivative national churches (such as the Russian) with that form of ecclesiastical art which we call "icons": two-dimensional, highly stylized yet at times marvelously wrought and strangely individualized images of Christ and the saints. The West, for good or ill, has had no "Iconoclastic Controversy" to match that of the Byzantine Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries.

Here, we must ask: Was not Rome a part of the Church in the eighth and ninth centuries?

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THE SHACKLES OF THE LATIN CAPTIVITY

Or

The Opening Salvo

Part Three

Since we left you hanging in suspense at the end of Part Two, and you were hoping for relief from the oppression of the bloodthirsty Scholastic "god" and the Greek Super-goddess Necessity, we wanted to reassure you that help was on the way.

As an opening salvo against the evil doctrines of the "Captivity," hearken now to these words of Saint Isaac the Syrian:

Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are. Although your debt to Him is so very great, He is not seen exacting payment from you; and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. *Do not call*

God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright [see Ps. 24:8; 144:17], His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. "He is good", He says, "to the evil and the impious" [see Luke 6:35]. How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? "Friend, I do thee no wrong: I choose to give unto this last even as unto thee. Or is thine eye evil because I am good?" [Matt. 20:13-15]. How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? [see Luke 15:11ff]. None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it, and thus bore witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice, for while we are sinners Christ died for us! [see Rom. 5:8]. But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change.

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, or lose what He has, or supplement what He has, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has forever, as the blessed Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis. Fear God out of love for Him, and not for the reputation of austerity that has been attributed to Him. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not only for what He will give you in the future, but also for what we have received. And indeed, for this world alone which He has created for us, who can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no faculty of memory, as though we never existed [i.e. after death]? Who will awake this our body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? [i.e. man]. O the wondrous mercy of God! O the astonishment at the goodness of our God and Creator! O might for which all is possible! O the immeasurable kindness toward our nature, that He even will bring sinners back into existence! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, He renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending, and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature capable of thought, even though the sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of his resurrection. Where is Gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is the torment that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is Gehenna as

compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us from Sheol and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory what has fallen into Sheol?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with the glory of perfection. That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, O Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence, and there is not a thought left in me, not even for giving thanks unto Thee. What mouths can confess Thy praise, O good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds [i.e. this world and the next] which Thou hast provided for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.*

(Homily 51)

Next: Chains You Can Believe In (If You Choose to Ignore the Holy Fathers)

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THE SHACKLES OF THE LATIN CAPTIVITY

Or

Chains You Can Believe In
(If You Choose to Ignore the Holy Fathers)

Part Four

We hope our "opening salvo" from Saint Isaac of Syria encouraged you. In this part, the counter-attack continues.

The fact is, in contrast to all the irreverent speculations of the Scholastics, the Church's doctrine is clear: God, of His own free will, voluntarily (and not because of Necessity) chose to redeem us the way He did. In no way was He forced or constrained to it. We always speak of the *voluntary* Death and Passion of our Saviour, and the hymns of the Church are replete with this theme:

*Text of St. Isaac's Homily, Copyright 1984, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA

When the Lord was coming to His *voluntary* Passion. . . .
(A hymn of Monday Matins of Holy Week)

I, the Creator, am, *of Mine own will*, clothed with the form
of impoverished Adam...
(First Ode of Monday Matins of Holy Week)

He Who is sinless *willingly* submits to all things, that on all He may
bestow resurrection from the dead.
(A hymn of Friday Vespers of Holy Week)

Thou didst desire to make it known to all that Thou wast *willingly*
betrayed, in order to snatch the world from the enemy....
(Kathisma of Friday Matins of Holy Week)

Furthermore, what are the words intoned by the priest at the end of the Holy Week services, that is, in the week when our Saviour endured the Passion for us? From Vespers on Palm Sunday evening through Holy Wednesday, he says: "He that cometh to the *voluntary* Passion for our salvation, Christ, our true God...." From Holy Friday through Matins of Holy Saturday, he says: "He that for us men and for our salvation accepted the dread Passion, the life-creating Cross, and *voluntary* burial in the flesh, Christ our true God...."

Indeed, how different the thought of the Scriptures and the Fathers is from Anselm's conjectures can be seen clearly from what Saint Gregory the Theologian writes on the same subject. The Saint asks:

To whom was that Blood offered that was shed for us, and why was it shed? I mean the precious and glorious Blood of God, the High Priest and Victim. We were in bondage to the devil and sold under sin, having purchased injury for ourselves with our voluptuousness. Now, since a ransom is paid to him who holds us in power, I ask to whom such a price was offered and why? If to the devil, fie upon the outrage! The robber receives the ransom, not only from God, but a ransom consisting of God Himself! He demands so exorbitant a payment for his tyranny that it would have been right for him to have freed us altogether. But if the price is offered to the Father, I ask first of all, how? For it was not the Father who held us captive. Why then should the Blood of His Only Begotten Son please the Father, Who would not even receive Isaac when he was offered as a whole burnt offering by Abraham, but replaced the human sacrifice with a ram? *Is it not evident that the Father accepts the sacrifice not because He demanded it or because He felt any need for it, but on account of His loving dispensation:* because man must be sanctified by the humanity of God, and God Himself must deliver us by overcoming the tyrant through His own power, and drawing us to Himself by the mediation

of the Son Who effects this all for the honor of God, to Whom He was obedient in everything.

(On the Holy Pascha, 22)

(And really, when one thinks about it, the Blood of the Son of God is, in a very real way, offered to *us* "unto healing of soul and body and forgiveness of sins.")

So *this* was the purpose of the Incarnation of our Saviour: that He might deliver us from our sins, and from the bonds of death and corruption which ruled as a tyrant unjustly "even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," as St. Paul tells the Romans; that He might sanctify our nature; that, by adoption and by grace, He might deify us and make us "gods," for, as Saint Athanasius the Great says, "God became man that man might become god," and *not* because God the Father was thirsting to be satisfied by the Blood of God the Incarnate Son.

Even the terms "offering," "sacrifice" and "ransom," though used in the Scriptures, are inadequate and cannot fully explain the mystery of our salvation. For Saint Gregory the Theologian points this out when he says that a ransom is paid to one who holds the victim in captivity. But the Father of lights was not the one holding us in captivity. A ransom is given to one who asks for it. But our Heavenly Father did not ask for it. What kind of ransom is this?

In Saint Paul's time, slaves were a common commodity, like food, clothing or furniture. Prisoners of war or the citizens of an entire city taken in war, were bought and sold like sheep, oxen, or horses. Slaves could not ever hope to be free again in this life unless someone ransomed them, and set them free. So, Saint Paul uses the image of a "ransom" since his audience — many of them slaves themselves — could easily relate to it, and understand what he was getting at.

The inadequacy of our language makes us all "liars", as the Psalmist declares ("I said in mine ecstasy, every man is a liar." Ps. 115:2); not because we "abhor the truth" but because creaturehood can neither comprehend, nor give adequate utterance to the Uncreated and to His incomprehensible dispensation for us. And so we stumble around, looking for this word and that, attempting to make these "lies" less blatant when we seek to express "the foolishness of preaching."

How to Lose Your Baggage

This brings us to another aspect of the problem of the "Latin Captivity", and it applies especially to those of us who are converts to Orthodoxy from either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. We must take care not to assume that Orthodoxy and the Western heresies are in agreement on this or that point, when in fact, they are not in agreement at all (as in the matter of "Original Sin" and "Atonement," and as in many other basic matters, such as: the nature of grace, the state of those that are saved and the nature of the very Godhead itself,

to mention only a few). We must be careful not to assume that we know the Orthodox viewpoint on any given theological subject, when, in fact, the only viewpoint we know is the non-Orthodox one which we have unwittingly brought with us as "baggage" when we entered Orthodox Catholic Christianity.

Sometimes, converts come to Orthodoxy with no suspicion of what the true doctrine of the Church really is. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the various theological terms are the same or similar, and they naturally assume that the theology behind these terms is also the same, when it isn't. How many times we have seen converts who have come to Orthodoxy in good faith and humility be overcome with joy like little children on learning of the Church's true doctrine concerning "Original Sin" and redemption. They become like ones who have been relieved of a heavy and oppressive burden; for, in truth, the thought of a vengeful and wrathful "God" who visits the guilt of the fathers upon the children, who needs to be satisfied with the Blood of his Son before his "Divine Love" can begin to operate, who *demand*s this Blood before he will be reconciled to us, who imposes this act of atonement not only on his own Son, but expects acts of atonement from each of us in addition, can, indeed, be a very oppressive burden.* But this is not the God of the Christians. Fortunately, he is a fabrication, a created "idol" of the Scholastics, and they and their disciples are the ones who have to cope with him and his morbidness. These indeed, are the "chains we can believe in"*** if we choose to ignore the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

But these pernicious doctrines of the Medieval West are yet another reason why Ecumenism is so wrong.

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WE OPENED THE WINDOWS TO THE WEST

(But Forgot to Put Up the Screens)

There have been few periods in Church History more tragic than the time after the Fall of Constantinople. In the Balkans and in the Mediterranean area, our people were laid low by slavery and subjugation to the Moslems. In Russia, in Transylvania and especially in the Ukraine, our people were subjected to constant harassment and attack from the Swedes, the Germans, and the Poles. The Roman Catholics and Protestants were quick to take advantage of this situation and, as we see in the lives of Saint Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint Dimitri of Rostov, and Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, they did everything they could to infiltrate, influence, and pervert the Orthodox Faith. Our people

*One eminent Western theologian, Heinrich Emil Brunner, went so far as to say that since Divine Justice had been satisfied by the crucifixion of Christ, he was not interested in whether the body of the Lord truly did arise, or if it decomposed in the grave....

**A pun on Barack Obama's presidential campaign slogan: "Change we can believe in."

knew that these heterodox were wrong and that they had to be were exceedingly glib, and the level of theological learning among our people was not what it had once been. The patristic texts were not so readily obtainable, and since, in any case, the Fathers had never written any "Systematic Theology" and a knowledge of them involved both a great deal of expense and time (and, I might add, if this is true now, how much more was it true then), our people very often resorted to the unfortunate, but easy, expedient of using Protestant arguments against the Roman Catholics, and Roman Catholic arguments against the Protestants (as we see in the Calvinistic *Confession* of Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris and in the latinizing *Catechism* of Metropolitan Peter Moghila of Kiev, to mention only two of the many that followed). The only trouble with this tactic (besides being wrong!) is that in neither case is one defending the *Orthodox Catholic* Faith. And there is another aspect to this dangerous strategy. It is not a good idea to be reading (much less using) heretical material. Saint Isaac of Syria, in fact, is very explicit on this point:

Beware of the doctrines of heretics, for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you.

(*Homily Four*)

Alas, if one is involved with heretical material too long, he begins to be infected with it, the result being a "theologian" whose outlook is not totally (or sometimes, not even remotely) Patristic, but rather Latin or Protestant, or some bizarre mixture of both. This unfortunate period in Church History is known as the "Western" or "Latin Captivity."

Hence, one finds doctrines like Anselm's satisfaction theory, that is, "the perfect satisfaction to the justice of God" or "the suffering willed by God a just payment for sin," which — although they appear *nowhere* in the Holy Scriptures or the Holy Fathers — are phrases found again and again in the various latter-day catechisms printed in Russia and Greece, even though the doctrine itself was first invented and promulgated by a Roman Catholic theologian of the Scholastic school.

We are not at all scandalized by the fact that many illustrious churchmen, including even our God-bearing Father Saint Nectarius of Pentapolis, have these non-patristic and non-Biblical phrases appearing in their catechisms. In fact, this whole situation reminds us of an incident from the life of the great wonderworker Saint Gerasimus of Jordan. The Saint had gone to visit Saint Euthymius the Great, who was at that time living in the wilderness of Rubah. They had discussed many and various spiritual matters, when, in the course of the conversation, Saint Euthymius, "the theological mind of the desert," pointed out to Saint

Gerasimus that his belief concerning our Saviour was heretical. Saint Euthymius corrected Saint Gerasimus upon this point and set him straight on the matter of Christology. The fact of the matter is that, out of his simplicity and guilelessness, Saint Gerasimus, like Peter, Mark, Julian, and Silvan the anchorites, had been deceived and led astray by the Monophysite bishop Theodosius, and had unwittingly accepted his teaching.

When Saint Gerasimus returned to his cell, he was overwhelmed by many thoughts so that he became confused and troubled. For you see, he was a great wonderworker. And although the Saint, in his humility, understood that it was God and not he that had wrought all these miracles through him, he began to doubt Saint Euthymius' words. For he reasoned to himself, "If I were in heresy, would not the heresy be an impediment for the grace of God to work signs and wonders?" And it was revealed to him that God had seen that he had accepted the heretical doctrine out of simplicity, and not out of evil intent. And God, of course, had also foreseen the Saint's repentance. Indeed, in his fourth homily on the *Book of Job*, Saint John Chrysostom tells us, "For if one should sin out of guilelessness, God corrects those things that are done out of guilelessness and simplicity."

Furthermore, in the writings of SS. Barsanuphius and John, we read that a group of monks had come to Saint Barsanuphius to ask him concerning the apparently Origenistic teaching of *Apokatástasis* (the universal restoration and ultimate salvation of all creation, including the demons) which appears in the writings of Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Saint Barsanuphius first censures the monks for their untimely curiosity in matters that do not directly concern their spiritual discipline, and he tells them:

We have ignored the Apostle Paul who writes, "Let all wrath and anger and blasphemy be put away from you, as well as all evil" (and to this I would add gluttony, fornication, greed and all the other passions) for which things we must needs weep day and night. . . . Ye have not brought to mind the Prophet who "forgot to eat his bread" and ye waste your time, and are careless, and have ye already reached that level where ye are able to discuss such matters?

But then the Saint continues by saying that he will answer these thoughts, which the monks were having about Saint Gregory of Nyssa:

Yet, I did not wish to leave you with such thoughts and I

remembered him that said, "Bear ye one another's burdens." Harken, therefore, to this which God revealed to me three days before ye wrote your question.

All the Fathers who pleased God were holy and righteous and true servants of God (may they ever pray in my behalf!). But do not think that because they were saints they were able truly to comprehend all the deep things of God. For the Apostle says, "we know in part and we prophesy in part" and again, "to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. . . ." and all these are not given to one man, but to some in this manner and to some in that manner; "but all these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit." For the Apostle, knowing that the things of God are incomprehensible, cried, saying: "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor?" Wherefore, attempting to be teachers, or rather, being constrained in this by other men, they advanced greatly, even beyond their teachers, and receiving revelation concerning new doctrines, these did they set forth. But at the same time, they yet retained their instructors' traditions, which, in fact, were erroneous. And though they advanced later and became spiritual instructors, they did not pray unto God as regards their teachers' doctrines, to learn whether or not those things spoken by them were indeed spoken by the Holy Spirit. But esteeming their teachers to be wise and erudite, they did not examine their sayings. Wherefore, their own teachings were mingled with those of their teachers; hence, sometimes they spake from the teachings that they had learned from them, and at other times they spake from the wisdom of their own minds. This was how it came to be that these words were written in their name. For they received some things from others, and having themselves advanced and become greater, through the Holy Spirit they spake whatever they learned from Him. But they quoted also from the teachings of their instructors without examining their words; neither did they consider whether they should be informed by prayer and supplication to God as to whether or not these teachings were true; and thus, the teachings were mingled one with another. Yet, because these words were spoken by the Saints, they were also written in their names.

If, therefore, you should hear one of them saying that he

speaks that which he heard from the Holy Spirit, that is a revelation (*pleroforía*), and we are obliged to believe it. But, should you find him saying concerning these teachings that they are not by revelation but from the doctrines of his former teachers, then we must attentively listen to them with knowledge, discernment, and wisdom, for the Saint did not pray unto God concerning these doctrines, to learn whether they be true or no.

Behold, ye have heard all my foolishness. Be quiet henceforth, and meditate on the things of God, and cease your idle talk. Be attentive as regards your passions, concerning which ye will have to give answer at the Day of Judgment. Concerning these matters ye did not ask. How is it that ye know nothing, nor have learned anything concerning these things? Weep, therefore, and lament. Follow in the footsteps of your fathers, of Pimen and the rest, and run that ye might gain the prize, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be glory unto the ages. Amen.

(SS. Barsanuphius and John, *The 604th Answer*)

Incidentally, Saint Nectarius, who was in all things scrupulously honest, tells us in his *Sacred Catechism of the Orthodox Church* where he got that passage about "appeasing and satisfying the righteousness of God" [*sic*] (he took it word for word from the *Greek* translation [1834 ed., p. 106] of the *German* translation of the *Russian* original of the *Catechism* of Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, who was right in the middle of the period of the "Latin Captivity.") These books were what he was taught from in school.

In actuality, our beloved father Saint Nectarius is not so much known for his teaching as he is for his unbelievable meekness (as one can see from all the slanders that he patiently endured during his life) and for his great gifts of wonderworking and healing. And this is nothing to marvel at, for the holy Apostle Paul writes:

And God hath placed some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

(I Cor. 12:28-29)

The fortunate thing is that there always were men who recognized the heterodox influences creeping into these latter-day

catechisms and dogmatics and apologetics' handbooks, and they were not slow in speaking out against them (so no one can ever say that there was a "break" or a "gap" in Holy Tradition). There was our own Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky. Also, the saintly Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov was one who constantly spoke out against the Latin and Protestant influences that were creeping into the Church. There were also countless numbers of Orthodox clergy and people who staunchly defended their Orthodox Faith. There were, in addition, the holy services of the Church, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the decisions of the Holy Ecumenical and Local Councils — all of which have remained inviolate and unchanged throughout the centuries.

As our beloved Metropolitan, Saint Philaret, the New Confessor, of New York, used to say, "Peter the First [known in the West as "Peter the Great"] opened the windows to the West, but he forgot to put up the screens." The West had a lot of useful, "first degree knowledge" things, as Saint Isaac of Syria would say. It also had a lot of not so useful things, like modern weapons, nuclear "devices", missiles, and chemical warfare, and, in its "theology", rationalism and scholasticism.

So, because we forgot to put up the screens, a lot of "gnats" got in and are still biting us. Some of the "gnats" are small and inconsequential, but some are whoppers and dangerous.

However, there *are* appropriate insecticides.

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THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Or

Pandemonium House Movers and Co.

I've always wanted to kick myself because I didn't save the newspaper article. Someone brought it to us when we were still at the monastery's first house on Orchard Street in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, in the 1960's. It was a front-page article from the Boston Globe, which, in turn, had received it from the Associated Press. So, I assume that other newspapers in our country must have covered the story as well.

*Other similar phenomena that have been reported elsewhere are: doors opening and slamming shut repeatedly and rapidly, although no one is nearby; water running at full force out of the water taps, though the faucets have been turned off; rooms growing frigid suddenly during the heat of summer, though there is no air conditioning, or the air conditioning is turned off; mysterious figures appearing and disappearing, or simply staring at the current occupants of the house, etc.

As I recall, it was about an ordinary suburban home someplace in Florida where, for no apparent reason, heavy pieces of furniture had started flying around in the rooms. By heavy pieces, I mean *really* heavy, like armchairs, divans, full bureaus, the dinner table, etc.

Now, what does your average American "apple pie and mom" family do when massive pieces of furniture start flying through the air like blackboard erasers in a classroom?

They call the police. Naturally.

Just dial 911.

Well, the policeman finally arrived, with his holster and weapon in place.

"All right, what's going on here?" he asked while standing at the front door.

At that very moment, a huge piece of furniture arose in mid air, and flew across the room, and smashed into the opposite wall.

The poor policeman was aghast and almost burst into tears. As far as he could see, there was no trickery involved. No smoke, no mirrors, no Houdini's. The flying furniture had narrowly missed a person who was walking through the room toward the front door.

The officer stammered, "I can't report this back at the Station! They'll think I'm crazy."

In truth, what could the poor man have done? Shoot "it" with his revolver? What could *anyone* have done, from our American, secular, materialistic point of view? Call an exterminator? Shut the windows to stop those windy drafts? Turn a laser beam on "it"? Fumigate the house? Drop an atomic bomb on it? (That would only tend to depress house prices in the neighborhood.)

Before we offer any more "apple pie and mom" solutions, it might be a good idea first to examine the properties of this thing, or force, or whatever it is, which was reported to us on the front page of an American newspaper in the twentieth century.

The Germans have a label for this type of phenomenon. They call it a "poltergeist" — a prankish or playful spirit. However, giving it a cute name is of absolutely no use to us. It is no help whatsoever when we need damage control, literally.

So, let us examine this "thing" carefully.

1. Whatever it is, it is invisible.
2. Obviously, since it can lift and throw heavy objects, it has considerable "physical"[?] strength.
3. It has some type of sense perception, because it always throws the objects *at* or *toward* people.
4. It has *ill intent*. It is *not* prankish or playful. It intends to *hurt* or *cause harm*, or at least, intimidate and frighten.

So, summarizing our observations, our uninvited guest is:

1. invisible
2. endowed with some type of "physical" strength
3. endowed with sense perception
4. ill-intentioned

When you put all these pieces together, it does not look good.

We encounter "beings" like this all the time in the Holy Scriptures, in the Lives of the Saints, and now, in our modern dailies.

Let's face it. Most people probably glanced at the article and said something profound like, "Hmmm, how about that?", and then turned to the sports section or the comics. For most, this sort of thing plainly cannot exist, and so, even when it is reported to them by our media, it simply will not register on their minds.

But if they had stopped to read it carefully, and to ponder all the ramifications and implications of that news article, which was presented to them on the front page of their daily newspaper, it might have troubled them to the core of their being, and turned their world upside down. What, for example, does this sort of thing imply for our very materialistic outlook and skeptical "we know it all" attitude?? Our society scoffs at the idea of "evil spirits," but what is *this*?

The Church does have a solution for this particular type of problem, and the solution does not involve bullets, or disinfectants, or laser beams, or atomic bombs. The solution is prayer; specifically, the Prayers of Exorcism.*

*I myself was present as an eyewitness on one occasion when invited to a home, in which all the icons in the children's room suddenly began to weep. As soon as the priestmonk whom I was accompanying began to read the Prayers of Exorcism, all the icons that were in the room stopped weeping. Although I did not count how many icons there were in that room, there must have been at least ten, I think.

True, your average American "apple pie and mom" family probably would not think of Exorcisms, right off.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a liberal Protestant professor wrote:

One cannot use the electric light and the radio and, at the same time, believe in the world of spirits and miracles of the New Testament.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), Protestant biblical scholar.

By the same token, I would venture to say: One cannot read modern American newspapers and, at the same time, believe in Rudolf Bultmann's ideas.*

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THE AGE OF REASON

We have spoken a great deal recently about Western rationalism, and about its effects on the theology of Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and, unfortunately, "World Orthodoxy." Sometimes, it turns up in the most unexpected places.

For example, I remember one incident from my seminary days in the early 1960's. There was to be an "ecumenical seminar" held at Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Representatives from many Protestant denominations were invited, as well as three or four faculty members from Saint John's Roman Catholic Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. A few students from our seminary were there also, among whom were our own Father Panayiotes Carras of Toronto and myself.

One subject that came up for discussion was "the baptism of infants", which, as we know, the Orthodox practice, and many Protestants do not. As Orthodox, we cited various testimonies from the Church Fathers as evidence in defense of infant baptism in the early Church.

The Protestants responded: "Those folks may be authorities for you, but they are not authorities for us. We accept *only* the testimony of the

*See my article "Blow the Dust Off."

Holy Scriptures. How can you Orthodox baptize infants when they haven't even reached the age of reason, and can't understand what's happening to them, and thereby accept Christ as their Saviour?"

"Not so fast," we responded. "Let's look at the Holy Scriptures carefully, and see what we find."

"In the Gospel of Saint Luke, for example, we read the following:

And Mary [the Theotokos] arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda. And [she] entered into the house of Zacharias [the father of St. John the Baptist], and greeted Elisabeth [the Baptist's mother]. And it came to pass that, when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe [St. John the Baptist] leaped in her womb; *and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*, and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! And whence is this to me, *that the Mother of my Lord* should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of thy greeting sounded in mine ears, *the babe leaped in my womb for joy*."

(Luke 1:39-44)

"You will notice," we said to the Protestant students, "that the babe — Saint John the Baptist — leaped for joy when he heard Mary's voice. *And he was still unborn*. How did he know what was going on? Had he reached the 'age of reason' yet?"

Momentarily taken aback, the students looked at us and smirked. It was as if they were saying to us, "You can't be serious that you believe *that* is a proof of what you are saying?"

And we said, "Wait a minute. Just a moment ago, when we quoted the Church Fathers to you, you told us that you did not accept their writings, because they are not authoritative for you. *Only* the Scriptures, you said, are authoritative for you. Now, when we quote the Holy Scriptures for you, you don't accept them either! You don't accept Holy Tradition; you don't accept the Holy Scriptures. What *do* you accept? What is the basis for this discussion? Why are we here at all?"

"Well," said one of the Protestant students, "everybody knows that babies jump around in the womb on occasion. So what kind of proof is that?"

"It's a proof of what we are saying because the Holy Gospel clearly tells us that Elisabeth spoke these words 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Yes, babies jump around in their mother's womb on occasion, but Saint John the Baptist, the Holy Scriptures tell us, 'leapt for joy' at the sound of the voice of the Mother of his Lord! How did an unborn baby understand *who* was speaking, that he should 'leap for joy' at the sound? Had he reached the 'age of reason'?"

Indeed, if Elisabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit," it means Divine Grace is at work here, and awesome things are accomplished. Rationalism's only answer to all this is to smirk, as our Protestant friends did.

We Orthodox Christians call Baptism "a Mystery." A Mystery tells us that God is acting in our lives by Divine Grace, but it does presume to define for us *how* Divine Grace is acting.

When, and at what age, does one begin to understand *how* Divine Grace works? At six months of age? At six years of age? At thirty-six? At sixty? When did "the Age of Reason" come to figure in this equation, anyway?

When Rationalism entered the picture, with the onset of Scholasticism in the West, that's when.

Some might consider it ridiculous that Zacharias spoke to an eight-day-old infant. But if we hold the truth, we will understand that the child who heard the salutation of Mary before his birth could hear the voice of his father. The prophet knew that a prophet has other ears that are opened by the Spirit of God despite bodily age. He who had the ability to rejoice in the womb had also the perception of understanding.

(St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, 2:34)

And Saint Gregory Palamas adds:

Like Elias, John anointed someone else [that is, his mother Elizabeth] to be a prophet in his place (III Kgs. 19:16), and while still unborn he equaled and surpassed both prophets [Esaías and Elias] in their perfection, because he displayed these attributes in the presence of the Lord. Once an unborn babe's members have been formed, it can move, but does not yet

have a voice, as it is not yet living in the air. When the Virgin, who was at that time carrying God within her, appeared, even though John was in the womb he did not fail to perceive God's presence and His dispensation, but extolled it, declaring the divinity through his mother's tongue (Luke 1:42). He leapt and rejoiced with her as — O wonder! — *he received in the Holy Spirit the fullness of the age that was to come in his mother's womb....*

John was sown and shaped in his mother's womb as a natural body, but by the mysterious anointing of the Holy Spirit while he was within her, he was shown to be a spiritual body, who leapt and rejoiced in the Spirit and made his mother a prophetess. Through her tongue he blessed God with a loud voice and declared the Virgin who was with child to be the Mother of the Lord, and He addressed her unborn Babe as the fruit of her womb, proving that she was at the same time both pregnant and a virgin (Luke 1:41-45).

(On Christ's Highly Revered Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, chaps. 4-5)

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BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS

Recently, I had occasion to write a brief note to one of our clergy on the use of our church buildings for secular purposes. This, in turn, prompted me to write about the matter of sacredness, and what it means to us as Orthodox Christians.

I would like to quote parts of that letter, and of two other fine articles that deal with the same issue.

First, here is what I wrote:

[After praying and thinking about this, I believe] that the use of our Church Hall for purposes of physical exercises, even temporarily, is inappropriate. Aside from the religious overtones which often accompany oriental "physical" exercises, there is also the issue of inappropriate dress (since these are the muggy, summer months, remember?). But more than that is the issue of the sacred character of our Church building. Even our meals in the Church Hall begin and end with prayer. The meals are an extension of the Divine Liturgy, and are a carry-over from the *Agápe* assemblies* of the

ancient Church. The holy icons adorn the wall in the hall, as they do in Church itself.

The one thing that we who live in the West are losing, or have lost, is a sense of sacredness. Some buildings, or objects, or people have been set aside and consecrated for sacred purposes *only*. They are dedicated *solely* to God. The buildings so consecrated are not to be used, for example, for concerts, or town meetings, or political assemblies, as they are in the cases of Roman Catholic, or Protestant, or Hindu, or whatever, structures. This is a concept that non-Orthodox Christians cannot seem to grasp.

As in Heaven, so also on earth, there is a sacred hierarchical order to all things. That is why our clergy dress the way they do and why our people live the way they do. That is even why our women cover their heads — as St. Paul says, "because of the angels."

That phrase, "because of the angels" is very intriguing. It opens a door that reveals many marvelous things to us. This, in turn, leads me to the next text, which I mentioned above, which deals with this issue of the angels:

I read in I Corinthians 11 that the woman's head is to be covered in worship. The modern Christian consensus [*sic*] tells me that this is a relative and obsolete command, dealing with some first-century problem in the city of Corinth. My high school literary skills tell me otherwise: The command is rooted in creation (ibid, v. 7-9) and in nature (ibid, v. 14). And if that weren't ironclad enough, I am to cover my head "because of the angels."

The angel detail is so cryptic, so off the wall, so without explanation, that it becomes the strongest argument of all. Where is the "cultural relativity" case now, where angels trans-

*Originally, "love-feasts" celebrated by the early Christians in connection with the Lord's Supper, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ecumenius, St. Theophylact of Bulgaria, and Theodoretus say that the *Agápae* followed the Divine Eucharist, but were held *in the same place* where the Eucharist was celebrated. To this day, in the Orthodox Christian Church, the chief item behind the icon screen is referred to, not as an "altar," but as a "holy table" — a reminder of its original function in the *Agápe* meals of Christianity's early years.

pend all historical agitations?*

From what I have seen in the Orthodox Christian interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, the phrase, "because of the angels" refers to the hierarchy that exists in the Church — a reflection of the hierarchy that exists among the angelic orders in Heaven and in the Church here on earth. One order differs from the other in its function and rank, and even in its outer appearance, both in Heaven and on earth.

The "Church Militant" — like any good army — has its hierarchy, its "chain of command": Generals, Majors, Captains, Sergeants, Privates, etc. Neither the Generals (the bishops), nor the Privates (the lay people) are infallible, and each needs the other and depends on the other. But, nonetheless, the functions and rank, *and even the outer appearance of each order*, distinguish the one from the other.

This hierarchy — both in Heaven and on earth — brings us to a better understanding of what sacredness is, and how it applies to our life. One of our priests — Father Seraphim Johnson — gave a talk about this at one of our conferences. Here is a small portion of what Father Seraphim had to say:

St. Dionysius the Areopagite describes the order and hierarchy which exists in the world, the order by which God rules over His creation. For the creation is orderly. We read in the beginning of the book of Genesis that the world was shapeless and void, but God brought it into increasing order through the process of creation, working through His uncreated, ever-existing Word. As St. Dionysius teaches,** before God made the world, He created the Angels in three ranks of three orders each: the Cherubim, Seraphim, and Thrones; Authorities, Dominions, and Powers; and Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. The chief angels the Cherubim stand directly before God, although even they cannot see Him in His true being, since He cannot be comprehended by any created being. Each rank conveys God's grace and instructions to the next rank, order by order, until they are brought down to our created world. And similarly, our prayers ascend up to God through the ranks of angels, each rank purifying and transmitting the prayers it has received.

**World*, June 1, 2007

** In *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.

This is not to suggest that we have no contact with God; on the contrary, we ourselves fit into this blessed hierarchy, in which everything is done decently and in order [vid. I Cor. 14:40]. For the rank below the Angels is mankind itself. And as the Angels are divided into three ranks, so mankind is also divided into three ranks: the clergy (divided into bishops, priests, and deacons), the sacred people (monastics, divided into novices, professed, and schema-monks), and those being purified (divided into the initiates the believing Christian laity; the repentant those preparing for Baptism or those who have fallen into serious sin after Baptism; and the possessed those outside the Church of God).^{*} Grace is mediated from God to the created world through these ordered hierarchies, showing us the beautiful and elegant structure which sustains the world. Each of us has a place in the hierarchy, a place which God has given us. Think how different this view is from that of modern science. In St. Dionysius's understanding of the universe, God's guiding hand is everywhere, mediated in an orderly and loving manner. There is no blind chance at work; there are no mindless "natural laws"; there is no purposeless evolution. Rather, there is meaning and purpose in every single act, because every one of our acts is either a proper participation in grace through our order and returning our prayers to Him through the Celestial Hierarchy, or it breaks the link in the hierarchy and damages the whole creation. For the point of the hierarchy is that each member must play his assigned role for it to work properly. Some of God's grace may fail to reach the repentant and the possessed, if the initiates do not transmit it. And the prayers of the initiates and those below do not ascend upward as well if the monastics and the clergy are themselves careless and impure. The significance of a hierarchy is precisely this: it only works properly if each rank performs its functions correctly. Satan's fall removed some members of the higher orders, and in a real sense weakened God's creation. Man's fall disrupted the hierarchy even more, since

^{*}When we say "possessed", we do not mean only those who are possessed by demons, as we see, for example, in the Holy Scriptures (Matt. 17:14-15), but also those possessed by the demons of greed, carnality, gluttony, arrogance and anger, for example. There are also those possessed by the occult, magic, blasphemy, heresy, unbelief, secularism, and atheism, and many other "isms". So, there are *many* forms of possession.

there are now no human beings who truly meet their calling in the Divine Hierarchy. If we look at the state of the world around us today, we cannot fail to see the disastrous results of the failure of Christians to fulfill their assigned functions. And the horrors of our world are substantially our fault, because we do not even see our role in sustaining God's creation, much less fulfill it....

The Divine Liturgy is the fullest expression on earth of God's hierarchy. At the Liturgy you can see the orders of the earthly hierarchy present before God's throne. The clergy stand at the front, immediately before the Throne of God, the Holy Table. The initiates stand in the body of the temple, the nave. The repentant stand outside the nave, in the narthex. And the possessed are completely outside the temple of God. The Liturgy is offered with beauty and order, raising our prayers to the Celestial Hierarchy to convey to God's throne, and in return bringing down God's grace to us on earth. At the Liturgy we join with the whole Divine Hierarchy in Heaven and on earth, and we truly see our place in God's creation. For this reason, our temples should be orderly, and all the people should be quiet and reverent, realizing where they are and what great order they are participating in. When the Liturgy is over, we must not lose sight of God's order for the world. We must continue to send our prayers upward to His throne in everything that we do; and we must look for His grace to continue to descend to us through our private prayers at every moment during the day. This is our calling as Christians. How different this is from what the world wants us to believe! We are not little lumps of meaningless flesh that live for a few years, seeking maximum pleasure, and then die and cease to exist. Rather, we are God's creatures, made by Him for a specific purpose and assigned a place in the order of the universe. Only you can fill the spot for which you were created. And if you fail to fill it, you detract from and damage all of God's creation. How awesome our role! How frightening to look at the world around us and realize that our failure to be what we were made to be is the root cause of many of the social and moral evils we see! One day our eyes will be opened and we will see God's creation as it is. I pray that day may be now, while there is still time for each of you to begin to take your place in it. But, if it is not now, it will be at the dread judgment seat of Christ, when it will be too late to do anything but gnash your teeth and cry out in rage, frustration,

and grief. Seize the opportunity while you can. Learn to see the world as it truly is. And take your place in God's order with obedience, love and joy.

This is why a sense of sacredness is so vital to us. Everything — including ourselves — has a proper place in God's sacred and consecrated order and hierarchy. Our lives, our very church structures, our clothing (including our clothing as Orthodox clergy, monastics and lay people), our discipline and guidelines in life, all reflect the fact that we are called to be *sacred* — that is, dedicated, set aside, for God *alone*. In our holy Baptism, we become a people consecrated to God *alone*.

In our effort to succeed in this struggle to attain to this sacredness, it probably would be helpful to us to remember that what we really want to do is befriend the angels of God. We want to be friends with them, *forever*. And they, in turn, will intercede for us. But first, we must befriend them.

With *that* priority settled well in our hearts, God, by His grace, will supply whatever is deficient in our frail efforts to attain to the sacredness of the Saints.

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O GOD, OPEN OUR EYES

Once, I was sitting in the airport at Salt Lake City, waiting to board a flight back to Boston. An elderly man sat down next to me, and seeing me in my black robes, he asked me what I might be. I told him I was an Orthodox Christian clergyman. Well, it turned out that he was a high official in the Mormon Church, and he told me that he was going to Boston on some business. Then he announced to me with some pride, "You know, there are some ten million of us Mormons in the world now."

"Oh, that's interesting," said I.

Whereupon, he asked me, with some condescension in his voice, "And how many of you folks might there be?" (Obviously, he was thinking to himself, "How many black-robed and bearded figures do we see walking around here in Utah?")

I answered, "Well, let me put it this way. Some *sixty million* of us were

martyred by the Communists in the Soviet Union during the twentieth century."

He slouched and turned, and went back to reading his newspaper.

That was the end of our conversation.

But it's true. When you start thinking about it, there are a lot more of us than meets the eye.

For example, in our daily struggles to live as Orthodox Christians, we are not alone.

A lot of us complain, and think to ourselves, "Oh, we are so isolated." It seems to us that there are so many of the non-Orthodox, and so few of us Orthodox Christians, especially here in North America. But we North American Orthodox Christians are not alone.

First of all, there are the countless members of the Church Triumphant — all those that have gone before us for all the many centuries and ages past, and who now intercede and pray for us. They are still here with us.

Then there are the angelic hosts.

There is one striking passage from the Old Testament that brings home to us what role the angels of God play in our lives. It is found in the Fourth Book of Kings (Septuagint) and tells us of an incident from the life of the Prophet Elisseus (Elisha):

The soul of the king of Syria was very much disturbed concerning [the fact that Israel knew beforehand of his war plans against them on many occasions]; and he called his servants, and said to them: "Will ye not tell me who betrays me to the king of Israel?" And one of his servants said, "Nay, my Lord, O king, for Elisseus the prophet who is in Israel reports to the king of Israel all the words whatsoever thou mayest say in thy bedchamber." And the king said, "Go, see where this man is, and I will send and take him." And they sent word to the king saying, "Behold, he is in Dothaim." And he sent thither horses and chariots, and a mighty host; and they came by night, and compassed about the city. And the servant of Elisseus rose up early and went out; and behold, a host compassed the city and horses and chariots; and the servant said to Elisseus, "O master, what shall we do?" And Elisseus

said, "Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them." And Elisseus prayed and said, "Lord, I pray Thee, open the eyes of the servant and let him see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses, and there were chariots of fire round about Elisseus.

(IV Kings 6:11-17)

Would that God would open our eyes also; then we would see that there are a lot more of us than we think.

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